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ABSTRACT

The articles contained in this pamphlet are presented to give educators and interested parents a frame of reference toward an important new curriculum area, family life and sex education. Sex education must be looked at from a multi-dimensional approach. Chapter One centers on the building of objectives for a program in sex education. These objectives are formulated partially by student need. Chapter Two discusses the sources from which youth typically obtain their information about sex. Chapter Three is concerned with the various administrative problems in considering and implementing a program in family life and sex education. Chapter Four revolves around evaluating school programs in family life and sex education. The final chapter pleads that new emphasis be placed on vital, life problems among youth and calls for cooperative interactions between school and community.
(Author)

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*Sex Education
in the Public Schools*

Hershel D. Thornburg

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A multi-dimensional approach based
on research and consultant work in
Arizona and California public schools

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*Sex Education
in the Public Schools*

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Introduction

One of the prime objectives of education is to present to the learner information necessary to good personal adjustment and functioning. Working from this persuasion, the articles contained in this pamphlet are presented to give educators and interested parents a frame of reference toward an important new curriculum area, family life and sex education.

Social order today is in a state of flux. Many traditional practices are being modified or completely overturned. One of the prime areas of change are attitudes toward human sexuality. Often change precipitates confusion, a lack of direction or uncertainty as to what behaviors are appropriate. The articles herein support a program of family life and sex education within America's educational system. The position is taken because the author is persuaded that some plan of attack must be implemented to resolve many unnecessary conflicts existing in today's pre-adolescent and adolescent.

Sex education must be looked at from a multi-dimensional approach.

Chapter One centers on the building of objectives for a program in sex education. These objectives are formulated partially by student need. Chapter Two discusses the sources from which youth typically obtain their information about sex.

Chapter Three is concerned with the various administrative problems in considering and implementing a program in family life and sex education. Chapter Four revolves around evaluating school programs in family life and sex education. The final chapter in the pamphlet pleads that new emphasis be placed on vital, life problems among youth and calls for cooperative interactions between school and community.

H.D.T.

February 21, 1969
Tucson, Arizona

Chapter One: A Teaching Approach

Relentlessly educators and psychologists have pointed out the need for sex education among the youth of America. The concern has been emphatic and nationwide in scope. The creation of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) in 1964, the priority on family life and sex education given in the recent Title V (c) Higher Education Act and a recent sex education resource unit published by the American Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation are just three examples of the emphasis being given in this area.

There is little argument among the professionals as to the need, and very little as to who should provide sex education and when it should be provided. While there is general consensus that the school is the place for formal sex education to be given and that it should probably begin during the junior high school years, the literature on what should be included in a sex education teaching unit is sparse.

There are apparently two schools

**Sex education
potentially harmful**

of thought regarding sex education in the schools. One indicates that sex education should be realized as one aspect of the total curriculum and not as a single subject to be taught. The second viewpoint emphasizes a program which will give our adolescents a sense of guidance, information and control in integrating sex into their lives. Supporting the second viewpoint, this chapter is concerned with the objectives involved in a sex education program.

It is conceivable that without proper objectives and orientation, a sex education program could do as much harm as good to students. Therefore five primary objectives are listed with supporting statements which reflect an over-all integrative function to teaching sex in its physiological and psychological dimensions.

Objective 1—It is necessary to give students the sound factual information and knowledge necessary for their development as healthy, well-adjusted adolescents.

In meeting this objective, students should become familiar with common sexual terminology such as masturbation, intercourse, seminal emissions, ejaculation and menstruation. This gives them knowledge of biological and developmental terms and an awareness of the changing but normal biological maturation processes. A

better understanding of one's body biologically will give a more adequate basis for understanding the physiological dimensions of sexual behavior.

Objective 2 — It is necessary to explore emotional problems confronting adolescents.

Most sexual behavior is determined by the adolescent's reaction to parental, teacher and community pressure. He becomes vitally concerned about the acceptable manner in which he may function socially and sexually. Therefore he shapes his emotional life around various problems he encounters when interacting with adult models. Perhaps most important to the adolescent's proper emotional development is an awareness of parental opinion on sexual behavior.

Objective 3 — It is necessary to explore physical problems adolescents must face.

Of prime concern to the adolescent is his general personal attractiveness and its subsequent effect on his sexual life. Also many adolescents have physical or mental limitations which may alter their sex role. Often these two problems are never considered as problems but rather as personal issues which somehow are automatically resolved. Unfortunately, failure to consider these facts has caused

Personal attractiveness important

undue frustration for many of America's youth.

Objective 4 — It is necessary to help students develop a sense of personal moral responsibility based on the standards of the community in which they live.

Defining this objective becomes a rather comprehensive task. How do adolescents feel about traditional moral and sexual codes? How do they feel about changing moral and sexual codes? From whom within the community do they receive the sense of direction for which they are looking?

Involved in the answers to these questions are the adolescent's reactions to the various pressures of his peer group. His reaction to the diversified moral and sexual behavior patterns of adults should also be considered. The adolescent's reaction to billboards, advertising, television, magazines, movies and other media becomes part of a never ending and constantly confusing process of how to have a workable behavioral pattern that not only satisfies his personal needs but also gives him the all important integrative function of coming to terms with the culture in which he lives.

How to come
to terms

Objective 5—It is necessary to help students develop simultaneous psychological and physical readiness for moral and sexual action.

It cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to make our young people psychologically aware of themselves as well as physiologically aware of their capabilities.

It is important to develop a sense of self-responsibility for individual behavior. This cannot be done by simply allowing the adolescent to become aware of his physical readiness for sexual behavior. Rather, he needs to understand his sexual drive and its manifested behavior from a viewpoint that encompasses mental, emotional, psychological and moral dimensions. This can be facilitated by building into youth reflective thinking power regarding personal actions.

**A sense of
self-responsibility**

One other important phase of objective five is to develop in the adolescent an awareness of his responsibility to others and society in relation to overt behavior.

There can be little opposition to the statement that the adolescents of our society need to develop a healthier definition of their role in a culture with an exploding sexual emphasis. However, our society is guilty of a serious misapprehension if it expects our youth to develop such while living and interacting with an adult society

which has yet to resolve this issue for itself.

Because of the multiplicity and wide range of questions asked by our youth, and because most who ask them have not been given sexual instruction at home, at school, at church or in the community, the only practical solution to this ever-increasing problem is to develop a teaching unit which will provide a high level of guidance and instruction to the youth of our nation.

Chapter Two: The Student Angle

Schools have long neglected to provide adolescents with adequate sex information and there is evidence from a recent study conducted among Arizona college students that little progress has been made in Arizona schools in recent years. Despite the dissemination of increased information about sexuality in schools and in creditable literature available to students, our youth acquire a great deal more information from their peers than from their parents, the schools, or other sources such as ministers and physicians.

The adolescent youth is besieged by conflict. His parents, his teachers, his friends and acquaintances all differ in their attitudes, personal goals and external behavior from those of the youth himself. These differences are of vital importance to the adolescent. In most cases they set up in his mind a sharp conflict between his standards and the overt behavior which is expected of him by others. When parents display an unwillingness to discuss problems, or give the impression that opening such discus-

**The fear of
disapproval**

sion would result in parental reprimand, the youth is enmeshed in a conflict which, for him, assumes enormous proportions. Fear of disapproval severely curbs the willingness of an adolescent to approach his parents for explanations of sexual matters so vitally important to his self-understanding.

If the youth should seek his information in the next logical place, the school, he is likely to find himself similarly disappointed. Conflict arises once again when the student seeks definition of his sex role from the classroom. Teachers typically mirror the social expectancies of the adult community within which the school is located. If these are not modified at least by acknowledgment that other attitudes exist, and that it takes time to develop a mature, satisfactorily integrated attitude toward sexuality in one's life, the student is again thrown into serious conflict.

How can the youth resolve these teacher-offered, stereotyped analyses of sexual conduct in the context of the informal, sometimes misinformed and bewildering mores that stem from his more familiar adolescent behavioral code? The task that youth is confronted with is that of determining to what extent, if any, the school's approach to sexuality will influence his personal pattern of conduct.

It is an enormously difficult task. The adolescent is more immediately concerned with the approval of his fellows than with that of his parents or his teachers. For adults, whether parents or teachers, to attempt to superimpose their standards on the adolescent is a most futile exercise. Regardless of the question of sexuality, the adolescent's course through his maturing years is charted partially by a natural rebellion against authority, a burning curiosity which seeks immediate and full information about the question at hand, a frustrating ignorance that can be overcome only by years of seeking and a follow-the-crowd instinct that is subdued only with exceptional maturity.

There are some reasons why youth so frequently violates the social norms of the adult community. It is among other youth that life continues for the adolescent. This is the crowd with which he lives each day. To be excluded from this group or to become disenchanted with them is such an emotionally excruciating experience that he intuitively fights against it. In short, he simply finds it easier to bend and stretch adult expectations regarding his attitudes and values than those of his peers.

Self-understanding comes as a result of internalizing all social forces and influences and finding perspec-

Peers: one must
belong

tive in the midst of them. Many adults are oblivious to the influences working upon the formation of permanent attitudes in the minds of youth. Even young people themselves vary tremendously in their personal orientation toward sets of principles and beliefs. Yet the basic task is to be able within one's self to come to terms with the culture which surrounds one. Of vast importance to this never-ending quest is an understanding of one's sex role. Much of the adolescent's unrest stems from a lack of the basic and proper information concerning sexuality.

**How to supply
the information**

In any field, it would seem a comparatively simple task to supply information if that information is available. Not so, however, in the emotionally-laden field of human sexuality. From whom do adolescents gain such knowledge as they are able to gain? Who is sought as the main source of sexual information by most youth? Are adolescents satisfied with the accuracy of the information they acquire?

These questions ought to find their answers in two places: the home and the school. It would seem that the adolescent sexual dilemma, insofar as it is a problem of gaining information that is accurate and detailed, could be solved by the efforts of ma-

ture adults such as are found in homes and schools.

About 25 years ago, G. V. Ramsey in "The Sex Information of Younger Boys," (Volume XIII of the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*) described a study of pre-adolescents. The general trend, he wrote, was that both parents and teachers act minimally as sources of sex information. H. M. Bell, in the book *Youth Tell Their Story* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1938), showed that most youth gained their information from their contemporaries.

Adult sources are insignificant

H. Angelino and E. V. Mech wrote in the *Journal of Psychology* in 1955 (Volume XXXIX) that Ramsey's earlier findings were still applicable 12 years later. Data indicated that parents and schools generally failed "at least with respect to acting as an initial source of sex information."

Each of these studies seems to indicate a lack of sex education and information coming from adults. In attempting to see whether this trend has shifted over the past two decades we surveyed 144 students currently enrolled in an Arizona college. They were asked to report from whom they received their first sex information, regardless of its accuracy. The questionnaire referred specifically to information on: contraception, ejaculation, homosexual activity, inter-

course, masturbation, menstruation, nocturnal emission, origin of babies, petting, prostitution, and venereal disease.

Most students reported that their peers, rather than any other source provided the initial information about contraception, ejaculation, homosexuality, intercourse and masturbation. The source on origin of babies was given as "mother" by a majority of the students. Only about the concepts of nocturnal emissions and venereal disease did a majority of students respond that schools or literature were their primary sources.

Schools are not
doing the job

Despite an increasing amount of information being disseminated by schools and by reputable publishers, it is apparent that the group sampled received more of its information from peers than from other sources. The students listed peers as a first source of information 526 times on the questionnaire. Other major sources were: literature, 337 times; mothers, 287 times; schools, 279 times. At the bottom of the list were: street talk, 45 times; minister or physician, 24 times; fathers, 18 times.

While friends contributed most information to the members of the sampling group, literature, the schools and mothers also had a moderate influence on the adolescents' sex information. Fathers, physicians

and ministers made a scarcely noteworthy contribution.

The survey gains additional interest if the sexual terms are divided into behavioral groups as opposed to physiological groups. The following points result: petting and intercourse are crucial behavioral problems which interest youth in an early stage of their adolescence. While 86 of the students surveyed learned about petting from their peers, only 58 learned about it from all other sources combined. Just 13 derived information about petting from the schools. Knowledge about intercourse was attributed to peers by 79 of the students, while only 12 said they got their information from the schools.

Only in the non-behavioral aspects of sexual information do sources other than peers become significant. Information about venereal disease was first acquired in schools by 72 of the participants. An equal number learned first about menstruation, an inevitable physiological crisis for girls, from their mothers. The school, which could disperse information about this vital developmental function with comparative ease, provided such information initially to only 23 students. A total of 77 students said they gained knowledge about the origin of babies from their mothers.

The non-behavioral aspects

Such information is often sought after by an inquisitive child.

Since adolescents obviously gain so much of their knowledge about sexuality from other youth, it seems extremely important that schools help develop methods of assuring the dissemination of accurate information to them. Such information is vital at this age when students are learning to integrate themselves into the intellectual and social life of the community.

Chapter Three: The Administrator

Throughout the country there has been grave concern over whether family life education and sex education ought to be part of the public school curriculum. This concern is seen on the community level, on the state level and on the national level. When agreement is reached that these subjects do belong in the curriculum, there is additional concern over the extent of the program and the manner in which it ought to be conducted. The administrator particularly has had to evaluate the need for sex and family life education in the framework of his own school or district.

In so evaluating, the administrator must first clearly establish the need for sex education, being careful to spell out its goals in detail. Then he must identify the actual or potential problems which may be encountered in setting up the program.

It is erroneous to think that a district needs a program in sex education simply because other districts have one. Instead, the administrator has to discern and demonstrate the need

within his own school or district, then outline the program's objectives in accordance with the principles established in the first chapter, and be sensitive to the biological and psychological dimensions of concern to the students, as set forth in the second chapter.

Several problems immediately arise. To implement any program, an administrator meets limitations of time, staff qualifications and availability of instructional materials. When a number of Arizona administrators were queried about these limitations, the survey revealed that each of these potential limitations caused serious problems in setting up the sex and family life education program. Finding time to teach the subjects was of vital concern to 56 per cent of the administrators. Of even greater concern, however, was the question of the staff's adequacy to teach in this area. A lack of qualified personnel in this subject area was indicated by 84 per cent of the administrators. Combined with the fact that 66 per cent felt a definite lack of appropriate instructional materials, the percentages explain why many districts are hesitant to include family life and sex education in their curriculum.

The problems of time, staff, and

**The present school
staff is inadequate**

instructional materials are not unusual. They evolve from the organizational structure of the public school system. Yet, they are real, vital problems. Compounding them is the controversial nature of family life and sex education. Whether it is the school's right or responsibility to teach subjects that heretofore have been delegated to the home is questionable, and it has caused administrators to consider parental and community reaction. Each district must define for itself whether community need, interest, and attitude justify incorporating family life and sex education into the school curriculum. Opinion within a district will vary tremendously. To pinpoint the general community feeling, to identify conflicting opinions within the community, and to know how to resolve such conflicts seems to be a monumental task. The following comments, written by interested persons at a sex education workshop, suggest the variance of community reactions:

**Parental and
community reactions**

I'm for sex education as long as parents are allowed to know what is to be taught.

I feel this is as vital to learning as any other subject.

It depends entirely upon the text, control of the class, and by whom it is presented.

Just fine if the children are

taught what they are ready to absorb at their grade level without going too fast and giving them information before they are ready for it.

I am uncertain — I think it would be better to have adult classes first.

An Arizona survey

The survey mentioned above was a more systematic attempt to see how Arizona administrators sense the community's attitude toward family life and sex education. They were asked to rate attitudes within their school community as being either encouraging or discouraging toward a program of family life and sex education. The groups they were asked to assess were: PTA, civic groups, churches, school boards, school faculty, and school administrators.

Administrators viewed all community influences as being encouraging. 54 percent of the total response supported the inclusion of family life and sex education in the schools. An additional 38 percent were either neutral or gave no response. This indicates that administrators felt only 8 percent of the members of these groups were not favorably disposed to family life and sex education. Strong support was indicated by PTA's and school faculties. Even with the problems of time, staff, and instructional materials that must be faced,

65 percent of the school administrators were highly favorable to family life and sex education in the schools.

Two trends seem to come out of the questions asked Arizona school administrators. First, there would be some problems in incorporating family life and sex education as far as time, staff, and instructional materials are concerned. The other observation is that individuals involved with the school itself and individuals within the school community generally have an encouraging attitude toward teaching family life and sex education within Arizona schools.

Some difficulties evolve from the uncertainty of how to go about developing such a program. It seems that initially administrative-teacher discussions should be held to establish whether the need currently exists in the school. Daily contact with the students gives school personnel an opportunity to see firsthand whether such a program would be beneficial to students.

Administrative-school board discussions should be held to determine whether a program in family life and sex education is feasible at the time. Such issues as fitting it into the existing curriculum, having appropriate facilities and teaching materials, and assessing teacher qualifications are questions which the board and the

**The role of the
school board**

administration together must decide. Then curriculum personnel can become involved in resolving such questions as program objectives, content areas to be discussed, and special instructional problems.

After the school officials have made decisions about the existing need, community interest should be elicited by meeting PTA officers, ministers, civic group leaders, medical personnel and other key community people. With school and community leaders discussing this issue jointly, it can be determined whether an open meeting should be held in order to evaluate community-wide interest and support. Working together has the advantages of sharing concerns, assessing school-community positions, and gaining more comprehensive adult support for a program vital to the youth of the school community.

**Communication a
vital ingredient**

Regardless of the approach used to incorporate sex education in the school, communication is extremely vital. School personnel to whom the responsibility has been delegated should develop a schedule for implementation of its family life and sex education program. Accompanying this should be in-service training for teachers. The primary function of an in-service training program is to inform teachers of what is to be taught about family life and sex edu-

cation, how it relates to the total school curriculum, and what each teacher's involvement in the program is. In some communities it would also be advantageous to offer adult education classes to help interested individuals in the community better understand the concepts that are being taught in the program. The more teacher and community understanding of the program, the stronger the total emphasis becomes. It is a more encouraging program when it has been established on a broad supporting base.

It is not an easy task which school administrators have been asked to consider. In fact, the comprehensiveness of a family life and sex education program is somewhat frightening. However, it is not an issue which can be shirked.

Chapter Four: Evaluating the Program

Evaluation! The inevitable task given to educators in all phases of curriculum. A difficult task and an extremely delicate one when it involves family life and sex education. Since most public schools either have no existing curriculum in this area or are in the very elementary stages of teaching family life and sex education, I would like to discuss evaluation in three perspectives: (1) assessing the proposed program before its use in the classroom; (2) evaluation of family life and sex education while it is being taught; and (3) evaluating the program after it has been taught.

The importance of constant examination of a program before the actual teaching has begun cannot be minimized. In this area particularly, curriculum designers must be certain that the course they have designed meets the educational objectives they were given.

This requires asking:

— Are the concepts being taught appropriate for the designated grade level?

— Will the student be overpowered by the concepts and terminology to which he will be exposed?

— Have we insured accuracy of information within the proposed curriculum?

— Does the overall program give to the student sequentially adequate information?

All of these questions are talking primarily about one thing: how appropriate is the curriculum we have designed for the teaching of family life and sex education?

Commitment is vital to any proposed course in family life and sex education. Commitment requires involvement. Involvement in turn brings about a legitimate concern about what is to be taught, by whom it will be taught, and how it will be taught. A lack of commitment is often expressed by trying to incorporate into the curriculum a program which has been successful in another school. Experiences give evidence that this is hazardous. Commitment requires time — time for planning, time for preparing a curriculum guide, time for implementing the program. When a school district borrows a curriculum from another school district the commitment in time is tremendously reduced. An assumption is made which is not always true — that the needs in one school

**Borrowing is
hazardous**

are parallel to those of another school.

Assessing what is to be taught is a crucial factor. Whether it is to be taught in K-8, K-12, 7-8, 7-12, 9-12 will partially determine what is to be included.

An important central need is to build a curriculum in *family life and sex education*, not just in sex education. Mention family life and sex education, and almost everyone hears only the word "sex." Additional emphasis must be placed on the words "family life" in order to correct for this. Then the curriculum is constructed to show how human sexuality plays its role in the family life process, rather than the opposite.

By whom should family life and sex education be taught? This is the major question in the minds of parents, teachers, and school administrators. In a recent survey I conducted in California among parents, every parent surveyed asked "Who is going to teach it?" Teachers ask, "What is my role in teaching family life and sex education?" or "Do I have to get involved in teaching sex?" Administrators are concerned about the adequacy of their staff to teach it and how to remedy the situation. We must keep an awareness of the delicacy of this subject. To present factual information in a bold, unmitigated

**Who is to teach
the course?**

way is to do disservice to the curriculum. Therefore, mature teachers who have an awareness of what human life is all about become likely candidates for the task. They should be teachers capable of discretion and having a sensitivity to the variance of attitudes within the classroom.

An equally pressing question is how to teach family life and sex education. This question might best be answered by illustrating an approach that could be used with seventh-grade students.

**A seventh-grade
approach**

One thing that is often taught in the seventh grade is how living forms reproduce. This could be done by (1) giving knowledge as to what the reproductive organs are and how they function; (2) acquainting the students with some of the problems they may encounter as their reproductive organs mature; and (3) talking about reproduction in an objective, serious, and unembarrassed way.

A second objective of the program is how to have wholesome relationships with people of the opposite sex. This could be achieved by (1) discussing how to establish friendships and the value of the friendships formed; (2) deciding what the etiquettes of dating are; (3) giving an understanding of the relationship between activities such as petting

and the sex urge; (4) developing an awareness of the mores of his social group, the reasons for them, and the consequences of violating them; and (5) establishing principles or standards that will guide conduct in social relations.

The third aspect of the teaching needs to be centered around the home. It is extremely important that the preadolescent be able to know some things within the home with which he can identify as he goes through physical changes and begins developing heterosexual interests. The home could be presented by (1) discussing how family life is enriched through sharing; (2) knowing that moral and behavioral values prevailing within the family help shape family relations, and (3) acknowledging that individuality within a family carries with it a responsibility to other members of the family.

Identification with
home important

HOW DOES ONE EVALUATE FAMILY LIFE AND SEX EDUCATION AS IT IS BEING TAUGHT? This is a concern that may be overemphasized, probably because everyone wants to know if sex education is doing any good. We need to realize that our ability to evaluate this like any other academic subject is not present. Therefore, evaluating what is being taught depends on the philosophy of the

school.

If our objectives are to present information about sexuality then we could evaluate students by giving them a Sex Knowledge Inventory (such an inventory is available through Family Life Publications, Durham, North Carolina). If the objectives are to assess student attitudes about sexuality this could be done by giving students the Social Orientation Information Test, developed by this author, which assesses both knowledge of sexual terminology and attitudes about sexual behavior. If the objectives of teaching sex education are to promote abstinence during adolescence, then there is no way of assessing it. If the objectives are to reduce the number of unwed mothers and the incidence of venereal disease then it will take three to four years to know the results.

Is evaluation
essential?

Perhaps no evaluation should take place. By this is meant that because of the difficulty of adequate assessment it might be better not to try to measure learning rather than to do it in a haphazard, incomplete, and potentially offensive way. Most teachers are quite capable of assessing student responsiveness and participation in any subject. Family life and sex education is no exception. It very well may be that the best index of what has been accomplished in

teaching family life and sex education is a comparison of student participation at different intervals in the curriculum and over specific topics.

One thing seems certain. It is vitally important to assess a curriculum in family life and sex education before its inception and then again at the end of a program. At this point some student evaluation may be quite helpful in re-assessing the program. They could tell teachers if visual or audio-visual aids were related to class discussions. Students could evaluate whether the facts were presented clearly, whether there was adequate discussion time, whether films shown were more beneficial than discussions held, whether there was too much or too little information about certain sexual concepts, whether there were some parts of the course that would be taught best in mixed groups, or that might cause embarrassment in mixed groups, etc.

By taking student evaluation and combining it with teacher evaluation, a set of decisions can be made as to the appropriateness of the materials at the various grade levels in which family life and sex education are taught. Before the next academic year curriculum personnel and teachers then could restructure any phase of the program that may need

Students not to be
excluded from
evaluation

it, based on problems, inaccuracies, and inappropriateness of materials at any grade level.

Evaluation also tells the school what students and teachers think are the strong points of the program. It may very well provide focal points from which family life and sex education concepts may evolve.

The main purpose in family life and sex education is not evaluation. The main purpose is to give to students a systematized set of information which will help each individual student build within himself a better frame of reference to adjust to the society in which he lives. To do this the school must try to regulate family life and sex education so it eventually assumes its place next to other curriculum subjects without giving special emphasis to it.

Assessment for the purpose of building and re-defining a curriculum in family life and sex education appears to be essential to any program. Evaluation for the purpose of finding out how much a student has learned about human sexuality is certainly not undesirable but it should be done with the discretion of local school officials.

Chapter Five: An Uncertain Quest

Four phases of family life and sex education have been expressed thus far. They are: (1) objectives in sex education; (2) student needs in sex education; (3) problems in administering sex education; and (4) evaluating sex education. Now let's consider necessary problems to be encountered in helping our youth in their search for finding a code of practical sexuality.

The problem is that adolescents are physically adult, yet mentally unprepared for adult life. Growth, as we usually study it, involves not only change in form but also change in function and status. After boys and girls reach puberty and have gained the physical ability to have sexual relations, they are thrown into many heterosexual social experiences. Building an increasing dependence on peer groups and increasing an awareness of one's own physical capabilities throws most adolescents into a dilemma about sex. The social pressures combined with basic biological urges precipitates most adolescent sexual behavior. There is simply no

Society is ambiguous

denying that adolescents are physically ready for sexual activity.

The dilemma heightens when adolescents encounter mental and emotional blockades to sexual expression. The mores built into our society still treat sexual activity between unmarried persons ambiguously. Most adolescents find difficulty in fitting the so widely acclaimed relaxed attitude about sex into their behavioral patterns. This lack of social definition combined with the limited emotional experiences of most adolescents intensifies their dilemma.

Naivete demands a toll from the adolescent. With the upsurge in changing social and moral definition, we cannot afford to let our youth ride the crest of popular sexual behavior at great mental and emotional expense. They must be assisted in learning the consequences of engaging in differing sexual expressions. Many adolescents experience sex with a natural, simple candor. The well-known emotional binds so frequently associated with sexuality often do not accompany the adolescent's sexual behavior. Yet, because of all the popular verbiage about sex our youth are exposed to, and because of the many delusions they have, some systematic, enlightening approach to human sexuality must be attempted. Without it the cost of naivete may be too much.

Who is to educate? Most people feel that the desirable place for sex education is within the home. While the family could do a better job than other units in providing children with sex knowledge and information, there are other forces that have an impact on sex education: the school, the church, mass media, and peer groups.

Most parents believe that discussions about human sexuality should be approached guardedly. Through their embarrassment, lack of knowledge, or simple neglect, many parents never get around to discussing sex with their children. When it is discussed, most adolescents feel they are being preached to concerning negative aspects of sex. Only limited discussion about the positive features of human sexuality is heard. Rarely is it put within the framework of family life. The result has been a reluctance on the part of adolescents to discuss sexual matters with their parents.

Realizing the dilemma of the adolescent quest for sex information, educators have become concerned about the insufficient knowledge and the social problems that arise from a lack of definition of human sexuality. Therefore, numerous school districts are planning, or have already incorporated a program in family life and sex education into the curriculum to give our youth accurate and complete

Positive features
of sexuality

**Sex is portrayed as
exciting, thrilling**

information in hopes of reducing their naivete. We must remember — the school is not trying to usurp the authority of the home or church. It is simply trying to focus on sexual dilemmas of youth so that a reasonable code of practical sexuality can emerge.

The influence of mass media must also be considered. Motion pictures, television, and many magazines all allude to sexual conduct. The excitement, thrills, and naturalness of sex are vividly portrayed. Most sexual behaviors are presented in a way that lures or entices sexual play without consequence. While the effects of these visual barrages have not been fully ascertained, they are obviously powerful sources for adolescents to pick up notions about sex, although they often see only a partial picture of what sex is all about.

The most profound factor of sexual behavior among youth is the social impact of the peer group. As was reported earlier, more information about sex comes from peers than any other source. Off-the-cuff conversations, assessment of what the "in-crowd" is doing, and actual sexual experiences serve to educate our youth, though they do not insure them as to the accuracy of information received.

Youth share common problems and

experiences. Youth also share attitudes that make sense. Sex is no exception. Adolescents share the accuracies of sexuality as well as its inaccuracies. The challenge of providing youth with factual information is a great one. It is a topic about which they themselves invite discussion. And it is a topic to which they will listen in a responsible manner. Today's challenge is to understand. The challenge is to our adults. We need to understand and provide understanding for our youth. We should provide guidelines which will encourage youth to develop attitudes and values conducive to mature and responsible sexuality. Beyond that we must provide an appreciation of the positive satisfactions that wholesome human relations can bring in family life.

The challenge is to our schools and community. The need is interaction over new curricula. The pursuit is in behalf of our youth. The community must support the school and the teacher who is teaching sex education. The school must consider the community in developing its program. The school and its responsible teachers must reassure the community. Both must continually interact so roles do not become ambiguous and bruising conflicts develop. Above all, school and community must agree on this: Our youth need adequate, consistent,

**New curricula need
to be developed**

and formative information. They need our help to emerge eventually with a practical code of human sexuality. After all, they are *our* youth.

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